



February 25, 2008

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
United States House of Representatives
2262 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative DeLauro:

The School Nutrition Association of Connecticut applauds your commitment to ensuring that all children receive nutritious, balanced, and safe school meals. Your leadership, particularly on food safety, is invaluable and we appreciate all that you do for our programs.

We agree that more needs to be done to protect the safety of our nation's food supply. Our members were shocked and dismayed by the inhumane treatment of cattle by workers at the Hallmark/Westland Meat Company. Based on our experience with foods provided by the USDA through Commodity Program however, we believe this to be an isolated incident.

The USDA commodity foods our programs receive are generally high quality products that are as safe, if not more, than food products available in grocery stores and restaurants. While the USDA tells us one third of the beef from the recall went to schools, the majority, two thirds, went to commercial restaurants and retail. While in this particular case, it appears that a part of the inspection process was compromised, the USDA has an interlocking system of safeguards to protect humans and animals from illnesses such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy. Safeguards such as the 1997 ruminant feed ban, a strong surveillance system, and continuous oversight by federal inspectors along the processing line help to ensure the food provided to school nutrition programs is safe.

School nutrition programs also have safeguards in place. The school cafeterias are among the safest places to eat, not just in New Haven, but throughout the United States. School nutrition professionals maintain a superior food safety record by training staff and implementing Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) standards. This comprehensive system follows food through a food service operation to eliminate or reduce the risk of food borne illness. It is the same process NASA uses when preparing food for astronauts. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, school nutrition programs maintain exceptional food safety records.

Madam Chair, contrary to popular belief, schools are no longer a depository for low quality, unhealthy or "surplus" foods that need to be dumped. AMS, FSA, AND FNS have instituted reforms that now treat schools as customers. Each year a survey is sent out to ask schools which

foods they want and can use effectively, given local preferences. All foods supplied by the USDA must meet strict standards based on the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This means that they must meet acceptable fat, cholesterol, and calorie levels. In our effort to protect the safety of our food supply, it is important that we do not undermine parents' confidence in the general quality of the foods served in schools. Schools are no longer the outlet of last resort.

Thank you so very much for all you are doing.

Sincerely,

Victoria Biello, SNS
President, School Nutrition Association of Connecticut